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SUBJECT: MFA ON RUSSIAN TROOPS IN ABKHAZIA, SOUTH OSSETIA;
UNOMIG CONSULTATIONS

Classified By: Pol M/C Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In a May 26 meeting, MFA IVth CIS Ambassador-at-large Dmitriy Tarabrin and Deputy Alexey Dvinyanin denied any Russian interference in Georgia's internal situation, and rejected reports of recent troop increases due to the ongoing demonstrations in Georgia. MFA I/O Head of Division Peter Ilichev told us May 26 that Russia supported a new UNOMIG mandate for one monitoring mission in both Georgia and Abkhazia. However, Russia would caveat acceptance of the proposed 12-kilometer width for security and restricted zones by insisting on preserving its own FSB border guard presence on the Abkhaz side of the administrative border line. Dvinyanin rejected the subordination of Russia's April 30 bilateral border guard agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia to international monitoring arrangements, but offered that Russia was willing to significantly reduce its troop numbers below the previous level of 3,700 troops in each region, including border guards. Ilichev said the withdrawal of Georgian troops from Kodori obviated the need for a reference to that valley, while the resolution would use "standard language" to cover human rights concerns. Ilichev criticized the UNSYG report for being pro-Georgia and critical of the Russian troop presence, which he said was outside UNOMIG's mandate. Russia did not foresee extending the UN mandate to South Ossetia, instead hoping for the renewal of the OSCE mandate there.
End Summary

Russia not involved in Georgia's internal affairs

¶2. (C) MFA IVth CIS Ambassador-at-large Dmitriy Tarabrin and Deputy Alexey Dvinyanin told us May 26 that Russia was not interfering in Georgia's internal situation, even though it closely followed events there. While Russia had built up its troop presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia before the April 9 demonstrations began, Dvinyanin said that they were drawn down again to original levels a week later. Dvinyanin asserted that there were no recent Russian troop buildups in the breakaway regions, despite the renewed intensity of the demonstrations in Georgia, and rejected Georgian and press allegations to the contrary.

UNOMIG: FSB border guards, military deployments

¶3. (C) Peter Ilichev, Head of Division in the MFA International Organizations Department told us May 26 that Russia supported a new UNOMIG mandate for one monitoring

mission in both Georgia and Abkhazia. Although the Russian interagency process was still under way, Ilichev suggested that Russia would caveat acceptance of the 12-kilometer width for security and restricted zones on either side of the administrative border line (ABL), as proposed by the UNSYG's report, by insisting that its own FSB border guards fulfill the SYG report's proposal for up to 600 border guards and customs officials in the Abkhaz security zone. Russia would use the border guards it had deployed per the April 30 Russia-Abkhazia border guard agreement, Ilichev said. He acknowledged that other parties would find the GOR's plan unacceptable, but justified Russia's position with the argument that the SYG's report did not comment on the provenance of the border guards, and added that the Russian border guards would be withdrawn once Abkhaz guards had been trained.

¶4. (C) Separately, Dvinyanin confirmed Russia's acceptance of one UN mission for Georgia and Abkhazia, but suggested that, in order to find a compromise in UNOMIG negotiations, the West must agree to exclude Russia's April 30 bilateral border guard agreements with Abkhazia (and South Ossetia) from international monitoring talks. Dvinyanin said DFM Karasin had already formulated this position in Geneva May ¶19.

¶5. (C) Dvinyanin said that the border guard forces currently totaled about 1,300 throughout Abkhazia and less than 1,000 throughout South Ossetia, with only 200-300 stationed near the ABLs, while troop strengths were capped at 3,700 per region. In order to show Russia's "constructive approach,"

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Dvinyanin offered that under a new mandate, Russia would not keep its military presence higher than Georgia's, a principle it had adhered to until now for deterrence purposes. Russia was willing to significantly reduce its troop numbers below the previous numbers of 3,700 troops in each region, including border guards. The remaining troop and border guard strength would be the minimum military presence needed to deter Georgian aggression, Dvinyanin explained, while Tarabrin noted that Russia was already replacing military units by FSB border guards. The remaining troops would be stationed away from the ABL in central Abkhazia or South Ossetia, or even close to the Russian border. Dvinyanin, unlike Ilichev, offered no assurance that Russian borderguards could be withdrawn; instead, he stressed the agreement's five-year duration and clause for automatic renewal.

UNOMIG: Name, Kodori, human rights

¶6. (C) Ilichev further told us the new UNOMIG mandate, which should have a status-neutral name, could include the Geneva Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism for Abkhazia. He called for the new resolution to contain "strong language" on the observation of the ceasefire by all parties and agreement on non-use of force. Russia was looking to Germany to table a draft resolution, and had no plans to draft one of its own, unless talks on a German draft failed.

¶7. (C) Ilichev saw no need for references to the Kodori valley in a new resolution, arguing that such language had been included in earlier resolutions calling for the monitoring of the withdrawal of Georgian troops from the valley. As there was no Georgian troop presence there anymore, there was no longer any need for monitors there, Ilichev posited.

¶8. (C) Ilichev was confident that the resolution would address the human rights violations recently alleged by the OSCE and Council of Europe by including "standard language" on support for humanitarian work such as the creation of

favorable conditions for the unrestricted return of IDPs, and full access to humanitarian aid. He disagreed with charges of human rights violations by Abkhaz authorities pressuring Georgians in Abkhazia to renounce their citizenship in favor of taking Abkhaz "passports." Ilichev said the Abkhaz had assured Russia they would recognize "dual citizenship," which Ilichev called a "reasonable" position regarding long-term residents of a "country." Dvinyanin noted that he was studying COE Hammarberg's report carefully and accepted the need for improved performance on IDP return.

Russia displeased with UN SYG report

¶9. (C) Ilichev said that Russia considered the UN SYG's report on UNOMIG "unbalanced" and "pro-Georgia," as it referred in paragraph one to the "mission to Georgia" and allocated about two-thirds of the text to Abkhazia and only one-third to Georgia. Dvinyanin told us that the failure to publish the report by May 15 was a "violation" of UNSCR 1866 that needed to be investigated.

¶10. (C) In addition, Ilichev criticized that several pages of the report pertained to the Russian troop presence in Abkhazia, even though the UNOMIG mandate did not extend to their presence. (Ilichev later allowed that the Russian presence could be seen as a "formal violation" of UNSCR 1866, even though he claimed the resolution only pertained to Abkhazia and Georgia.) While UNOMIG head Johann Verbeke had assured Moscow that the report only "depicted the nature of the situation," certain "analytic" phrases such as the assertion that the Russian troop presence had aggravated tensions between Georgia and Russia had crept in. Although Russia could "survive" having a section on the Russian troop presence in the report, an uninitiated reader would assume that Russian forces were the main reason for tensions, Ilichev complained, while the report contained nothing on internal tensions in Georgia proper. He called it "paradoxical" that the report criticized Russia for building

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up its troop presence in Abkhazia, while acknowledging that the situation in Abkhazia was calm--a result of the Russian presence, Ilichev quickly claimed.

No plans for UN in South Ossetia

¶11. (C) Both Tarabrin and Ilichev told us that Russia currently had no plans to extend the UN mission to South Ossetia. Both expressed disappointment over the OSCE member states refusal to accommodate Russian textual edits, with Dvinyanin underscoring that Russia was prepared to see the OSCE mission depart, absent a change in Western negotiating terms.

BEYRLE